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*M. Stephens*

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REV. MR. BACON'S  
FUNERAL DISCOURSE,  
Pronounced at the Interment  
OF THE  
HON. JAMES HILLHOUSE.

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# FUNERAL DISCOURSE,

PRONOUNCED AT THE INTERMENT

OF THE

## HON. JAMES HILLHOUSE,

JANUARY 2, 1833.

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BY LEONARD BACON,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, NEW HAVEN.

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## FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

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THE occasion is one of unusual interest. A man beloved and valued in all the relations of life, a man long entrusted with great public interests; a man whose works are his monument, and whose name will never be forgotten while gratitude for public services, and veneration for ancient fidelity remain in the republic—is gathered to his fathers. In a ripe old age, laden with honors as with years, followed by the affectionate regrets of his fellow citizens, the patriarch is carried to his grave, “as a shock of corn cometh in its season.” We meet not indeed to lament over blasted hopes—usefulness cut down in its prime—the patriot falling from his high sphere in the midst of his toils—yet we meet in affliction, for who can see worth and nobleness departing from the world, who can see that form, towards which his eyes have often turned with veneration, borne away to be mingled with its kindred dust, without some feelings of instinctive sorrow. Our sorrow is softened indeed and made tranquil by knowing that his race was run, and the circle of his years completed; but, softened and tranquil, it is sorrow still. While we testify our respect for the dead, we cannot but mingle our sympathies with the living; and as those who are following a father to his grave can think only of what they have loved and have lost, so we, while bearing our part in his obsequies, find all his virtues, and his virtues only, rising to our thoughts, and claiming the homage of love and imitation.

It will fall in then with the proprieties of the occasion to retrace the leading events in the life of the deceased, to meditate on what was excellent in his character, and to inquire what instruction should be drawn from the contemplation of his history and his virtues.

JAMES HILLHOUSE was born at Montville, New London County, Con. Oct. 21, 1754. His father, the Hon. William Hillhouse, was for more than fifty years employed in the public service, as a representative, as a member of the council, and in other offices of trust and honor. At the age of seven, he was placed in the family of his uncle, the Hon. James Abraham Hillhouse of this town, by whom he was adopted as a son. So that though he was not a native of New Haven, this was his home from early childhood; and these scenes were dear to him by all the associations that bind one so strongly to his native spot.

His education was such as our schools and college at that time afforded. Respecting the early development of his mind and character, little can be recited on the present occasion. It will not be improper, however, to say—especially as the fact may produce a salutary impression on some young mind in this assembly—that he was somewhat advanced in college life before he became properly conscious of his powers or of the worth of time, or practically convinced of the importance of that close application to whatever was in hand, by which he was afterwards so distinguished. The late President Dwight, who was then in college as a tutor, though not *his* tutor, had noticed him with interest, and with the discernment of youthful character, which qualified the illustrious president to be the greatest teacher of his age, had seen in him the elements of future greatness; and he by one well-timed, spirited, affectionate admonition and appeal, roused the man in the bosom of the unthinking stripling, and gave the country a patriot and a sage. To that incident our honored friend often referred in after life with grateful emotion, and from that hour he regarded his benefactor with veneration.

He completed his college course and received the baccalaureate at the age of nineteen, in 1773, and soon began the study of the law, which he had chosen as his profession. Two years after his uncle, who had been to him from childhood in the place of a father, was suddenly removed from life in the midst of an extensive business as a lawyer; and to that business, Mr. Hillhouse, in a great measure succeeded, as soon as he could be legally admitted to the bar.

On the 1st of January, 1779, just fifty-four years ago, he was married. And what were the incidents of his first year of wedded life? Those were times when every man capable of bearing arms, was constrained to hold himself ever ready for the day of battle. The ardent and patriotic mind of James Hillhouse had caught the spirit of the times; and he had been prevented from accompanying Arnold in his memorable expedition to Quebec, in 1775, only by the absolute interdict of those friends whose will he was bound to respect. But now, in the summer of 1779, New Haven was invaded by the same force, under Gen. Tryon, which in that campaign gave so many of the smiling villages along our coast to rapine and conflagration. On that day, the history of which we have all heard from the lips of those whose memory goes back so far, our friend, then, as always, a favorite with his townsmen, commanded the Governor's Guards; and it is not too much to say that it was owing in no small measure to his sagacity in planning, and intrepidity in executing those hasty and imperfect measures of defense which alone were practicable, that the town was saved from the flames. The distresses of that day, may we and our children never know, save by tradition from our fathers. All that could fly, the aged and the little child, the matron and the maid, flying for safety, while the father, and the husband, and the brother, were opposing their bodies to the fire of the enemy—thirty of the citizens of the town and its vicinity lying dead in their blood—others of every rank, from the President of Yale College down to those in the humblest condition, wounded and ready to die—an enraged soldiery plundering the stores and dwellings, rioting in the streets, and nothing but the lateness of the hour and the fear of bringing in the yeomanry upon them from the country, to restrain them from laying the town in ashes—God grant that neither we nor our children may ever behold so sad a spectacle! It was amid such perils and distresses, that our friend began his course of public service. Such were the dangers and anxieties that came around his fireside and his bed, and hung over the home of his youthful love.

But his share in public and common distresses was not all. Three months after the incident just mentioned, death invaded his family; and behold his house was left unto him desolate. His



wife, ere a year had passed, was taken away from him and her infant was laid with her in the grave. Then it was that he sought consolation, and we doubt not sought it effectually in the eternal fountains. The death of his early friend and benefactor who had been a man of distinguished usefulness and piety, and whose death was that of the righteous, full of peace and triumph, had impressed him with a deep conviction of the value of that religion in which he had been trained from infancy ; and now under this new bereavement affecting him so tenderly, those impressions became more distinct and powerful. From some private devotional papers written at that time, it appears with what earnestness he looked to God for support and peace, and for grace to gather the fruits of righteousness from his painful afflictions. In November, 1779, the month following the death of his wife, he made a profession of religion, and became a member of this church, then under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. Whitelsey.

About three years after this event, he became again the head of a family by marrying a lady of great worth, the near relative and beloved friend of his former companion. Few men are more happy, or more beloved and revered in the domestic relations than he was, and in this connection, that happiness was uninterrupted till December 29, 1813, when he was again bereaved. His own death it will be noticed occurred on the anniversary of that day. At his special desire his wife was buried on the first of January, the anniversary of his former marriage ; for he wished his children, he said, ever to remember that day, as marking the beginning and the end of his earthly happiness.

When he was twenty-five years of age, his townsmen elected him one of their representatives in the legislature of Connecticut. From that time he had a place very frequently in the house of representatives or in the council, for eleven years. During that period he was three times chosen to congress, under the old confederation, but always declined taking his seat.

In 1791, he became a member of the House of Representatives in the Congress of the United States, the second Congress under the present constitution. Three years afterwards he was



chosen to the Senate, and for sixteen years he was eminently diligent, influential, and useful in that high station.

If I should attempt to speak particularly of his political life—if I should attempt to tell what policy he favored and what measures he opposed, I might seem to depart from what is due to the occasion; for it is well known that he was active in many a controversy which then convulsed the nation, and the roar and dust of which have not even now wholly subsided. Wherever he had a duty to perform, wherever he was called to act at all, there his talents and his temper made it impossible for him not to be found among the foremost. And as to the line of his political conduct, and his views of national policy, it is enough to say that while he was, by common acknowledgment, eminently free from party shackles, and was ever expected to think and speak and act independently, he was generally found in respect to the questions then agitated on the same side with such men as Ellsworth and Jay, Hamilton, Pickering, and Ames.\*

In 1810, by the appointment of the Legislature, and at the earnest solicitation of the wisest and most influential men in the

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\* One of the most remarkable incidents in the history of his connection with the national legislature, was his proposal to amend the Constitution of the United States, which was submitted to the Senate April 12th, 1808. The changes which he would have introduced, had more of the character of "radical reform" than any changes which have been proposed since the ratification of the Federal Constitution. Had they been adopted, the government of the nation would have become far more democratical in its structure and spirit than it has ever yet been. He proposed a House of Representatives chosen annually by the people; a Senate, the members of which should be elected once in three years; and a President, with powers much inferior to those now committed to that magistrate, who should annually be selected by lot from among the Senators. His speech in explanation of these amendments shows a profound knowledge of human nature and of political science. He maintained that in a republic the idea of checking the power of the people, and the people's propensity to change, by giving to officers chosen by them long terms of service—an idea which runs through the constitution of the nation and of many of the States—is altogether theoretical and mistaken. He believed that the more frequently all power reverts into the hands of the people, the shorter the term of every legislative and executive office, the greater will be the security against party spirit, against corrupt elections, against the ambition of demagogues, against all the evils commonly supposed to be inseparable from a popular government. Posterity may perhaps be of his way of thinking.

State, he resigned his seat in the Senate of the United States, having then several years of his third term of service still before him, and became Commissioner of the School Fund. That great public interest had previously been committed to the management of a Board of Trustees or Commissioners; and owing partly to the manner in which the fund had been created, and partly to some other causes, had fallen into an embarrassed and entangled condition. The best friends of that fund and those most acquainted with its history, have said that they would have been happy to have realized from it at that time, eight hundred thousand dollars. After fifteen years management, he left it increased to one million seven hundred thousand dollars of solid property. The difference was to be ascribed to his skill, his fidelity, his accuracy, his patience and his wonderful and indefatigable industry. While that fund shall be perpetuated, and shall continue to carry through all the streets of our cities, and to every rude secluded hamlet among our hills, the blessings of instruction, it will stand a monument to his faithful and disinterested patriotism.

He resigned his office as Commissioner of the School Fund in 1825, as his fellow citizens were urgently calling him, in his old age, to the conduct of a new, and in many respects, still more arduous enterprise. A great work of internal improvement, opening a new channel for commerce, was to be constructed by the contributions of individuals, voluntarily associating for the purpose; and to none but him could they look to be the leader of the work. At the age of three score years and ten he embarked in the construction of the Farmington and Hampshire Canal, with all the enthusiasm and hardy vigor of his prime; and for six years he sustained the charge, through every discouragement and difficulty. That work will be hereafter accomplished. The men are now living who will live to see it a great and busy thoroughfare. Then the last great labor of him who, for more than half a century, was the unwearied servant of his fellow citizens, will be acknowledged with gratitude.

When he relinquished his charge of the canal, a few months ago, he retired into the bosom of his family; but not to sink down, as some apprehended, into the apathy and torpor of age. During those months of retirement he was busily employed from ten to

fourteen hours daily, not only in reading with the avidity of youthful curiosity, but in revising and arranging all his papers, looking over and putting in order his voluminous correspondence, and now and then, as the happy recollections of his youth were revived, repeating to his family his vivid reminiscences of what happened long ago.

His connection with Yale College deserves a particular notice. He was made treasurer in 1782; and held that office till his death, a little more than fifty years. After the sudden decease of his lamented assistant, Stephen Twining, Esq.,\* he attended daily with close application to the great and complex concerns of that office; and it is worthy of remark, that the last act of his life, was the reading of a letter on college business, which he had just received.

A statement of his efforts and influence in behalf of Yale College, since he became connected with it as an officer, would be a record of some of the most important changes in the history of the institution. It was his foresight and diligence, and his great personal influence with the Legislature, more than any thing else, which obtained for the College, in 1792, after the assumption of the State debts by the Federal Government, a grant of the outstanding revolutionary claims—a most seasonable relief, which saved the College from extinction, and laid the foundation of its subsequent prosperity.† It was his influence, too, which at the same time effected that change in the charter by which the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and six senior Senators for the time being, are members of the corporation. When he came into office there were only three college buildings; and the entire corps of officers of instruction and government, was, the President, the Professor of

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\* Stephen Twining Esq. for many years assistant Treasurer and Steward of Yale College, died December 18th, 1832;—a man whose loss will long be felt, not only in that institution, but in the churches and in the community at large.

† The grant here referred to, was the greatest donation which Yale College ever received from the State. Probably it exceeded in amount \$40,000. It was made at a time when perhaps nothing else could have saved the College from total ruin.

Divinity, the Professor of Mathematics, and two tutors. He formed the plan on which the line of buildings has been spread out and is still to be extended. He has seen eight College buildings added to the venerable pile. He has seen one department after another annexed to the system of instruction, and one professional school after another organized to meet the wants of the country; till the humble and feeble institution, for the existence of which its best friends trembled, has been advanced from the rank of an obscure seminary, to the high station which it now occupies as in many respects the first literary institution of a mighty nation, and not the least among the great luminaries of the world.

We see what memorials he has left behind him. But these are not all—certainly not all in the estimation of his townsmen. Our city itself, we might say, is his monument. The streets that subdivide the nine squares of the original town-plot—the long colonnade of stately elms planted by his hands, under which we bear him to his last repose—yes, the quiet and admired cemetery where his ashes are to rest with those of Sherman and Dwight, all remind us of him.

Had a full delineation of the character of our honored friend, been expected on this occasion, some abler hand, I am sure, would have been invited to the task. All that I can attempt in these circumstances, is to sketch, by a few rapid touches, some of his more prominent and striking virtues.

His native character then, we may say, was one of great strength and originality. While the elements of his mind were peculiarly tempered and compounded, every thing about him was like his bodily frame, large, manly, and commanding. He was made to strike out his own path through the world, to walk in the light which his own intellect, by its strong focal power, should gather from all sources.

His independence did not consist in an insensibility to the opinions and feelings of others. Such independence belongs not to a noble mind, but rather denotes a monstrous intellectual conformation. He felt with the keenest pleasure the approbation of his fellow citizens; yet he ever scorned to purchase that approbation by the slightest deflection from the path of duty. His independence



was this: He asked what was right—what was useful—what was noble—and acted accordingly; then if his fellow citizens were pleased, he was happy; if any were offended, he had still the satisfaction of having done his duty.

His integrity was always proverbial. Integrity was written on his countenance, and every word that came from his lips made the hearer feel, That is an honest man. As a lawyer he was careful to undertake no cause respecting which he had not a fair conviction of its justice; and this, together with the plain-hearted and manifest honesty, which constrained every juror to believe whatever he said, made him successful as an advocate, far beyond any graces of diction, or accomplishments of elocution.

His enterprise and industry may without hazard be pronounced unparalleled. To this his whole history testifies. With a frame as it were of iron, with a boldness and physical courage, and a readiness and versatility which might have made him a great military commander, the amount, variety, and arduousness of the labors which he performed, are still almost incredible. His life was a commentary on the text, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” He had no hours of idleness—I had almost said, no hours of relaxation or repose. Ere the sun rose in summer, it was already morning with him, and the day was never ended till long after the night had darkened around him. And many as were his public cares, studies, and responsibilities, he of all men was the least sedentary in his labors. He loved labor, bodily labor, ever “working with his hands the thing which was good.”

All his feelings and passions partook by nature, of the same strength and impetuosity which marked his character in other respects. He was so constituted, that he had a quick and strong sensibility to every injury and every insult. Yet something had taught him effectually, to restrain those passions, and to bear injury with patience and insult with meekness. That something, I doubt not, was the grace of God. I know of nothing but christian principle, which can make such a man so exemplary in this respect.

His kindness, dutifulness, and irreproachable fidelity in the various relations of domestic life, have already been alluded to. It is a true saying, that every man is what he is in his family. The

same spirit of kindness marked all his conduct. The widow and the fatherless ever found him their ready protector, their disinterested friend.

Take him all in all he was such a man as is not often seen. Other generations will honor his memory; and while New England is true to herself, she will ever count him among her worthies.

It remains for us only to ask ourselves what lessons we ought to derive from the contemplation of such a man's history and character.

1. We see wherein consists true dignity and honor. None ever knew our venerable friend without feeling that he was one of "nature's noblemen." Whatever dispute there might be about others, none could withhold the acknowledgment that he was altogether a dignified and honorable man. Wherein then consists true dignity and honor, such as his?

*Not in an assumed superiority and exclusiveness of manners.* How far was JAMES HILLHOUSE, who dignified and adorned the age in which he lived, from all such factitious dignity! How perfectly plain, frank, and unpretending his manner in all his intercourse with all sorts of men! Yet every where, whether debating in the Senate, or moving in the circles of the refined and accomplished, or leading a band of laborers in some athletic toil, an unquestionable dignity marked his sentiments, his conduct, his manners.

*Not in wealth.* Wealth may fall to the lot of an idiot, or may be acquired by a niggard. James Hillhouse, in poverty—had he been brought to taste of poverty—would have had as much dignity, would have been as much honored by all whose honorable esteem is worth having, as if the wealth of the School Fund had been all his own.

*Not in official station.* Office may be bestowed on a Clodius or a Cataline. James Hillhouse, retired from all his public employments, was as worthy of veneration, as dignified and honored, as when he held the highest offices in the gift of the State.

What is it, then, which makes true dignity and honor? In the light of the strong example before us, we answer, Intellectual and



moral worth. In the case of James Hillhouse, it was the man and not the pretensions of the man, it was the man and not the accidental circumstances of the man, which all were constrained to respect, and to which all paid the tribute of a cheerful reverence. And it was the consciousness of what he was, the consciousness of manly powers and manly purposes, the consciousness of his own perfect integrity, kindness, and public spirit, which made him stand up, every where and always, like one who knew that he deserved and must receive the respect and confidence of others.

2. We learn what makes a man's life happy. Our friend was eminently a happy man. Happiness was written on his brow : happiness spoke out in all his words and tones, and shone in all his conduct. None can doubt, that his was a happy life. What made it so ? Was it exemption from cares and responsibilities ? When did he ever see an hour that was not loaded with responsibility, or that did not bring its host of cares. And who are more wretched than those who think they have no responsibility, and whose only care is to care for nothing. Was it wealth ? He had wealth indeed, wealth which brought within his reach all the luxuries and elegancies of life. But if it was wealth which made him happy, why does not wealth make others happy ? Why is it that wealth is to so many a weight of trouble, gilded indeed and gaudy, but still a weight of trouble. Was it domestic enjoyment ? For the happiness of domestic life he was, as we have said, well fitted ; he tasted that happiness with the keenest relish ; he was blest in all the domestic relations ; but who that knew him could believe, that this was the whole or the substance of his happiness ? Was it his activity ? Doubtless the ceaseless and intense employment of his active energies had much to do with making him the happy man that he was. Had he lived only in the retired and quiet bosom of his family, had he avoided labor as a curse, and spent his days in an inglorious ease, he would only have had to testify at the end, as multitudes have testified before, *Vanity of vanities ! all is vanity and vexation of spirit.* Yet thousands are active who do not find that their activity makes them happy. The activity of the unwilling laborer, whom necessity drives, like the ox, to his toil, the

activity of self-corroding avarice, the activity of feverish and thirsty ambition, the activity of the man who lives only for himself, is ever discontented as it is unquiet. Had James Hillhouse toiled only for the rewards of avarice or of low ambition, who can believe that all his activity would have made him happy. Nay had he lived for himself, in what you would call perhaps a rational and moderate way; had he refused all public employments, and pursued a life of retired activity on his hereditary acres; had the powers of his mind and of his body been occupied only with the labor of making his family happy, and of leaving a fair inheritance to his children, we should have had no occasion now to inquire, what made his life so happy. The fact is, his activity was *voluntary, active usefulness*. He aimed at the public good. He lived for his country. Thus his activity was activity freed from the corrosion of selfishness; and in all his toil there was a consciousness of noble purposes which lightened every labor, and even took away from disappointment the power to vex him. Thus his soul was expanded into more colossal dimensions, his being, as it were, spread out and extended; there was more of existence in a day of his life, than there would be in centuries of some men's living. His influence, his voluntary influence to do good, being thus extended, he lived with a sort of ubiquity, wherever that influence was felt,—happy in the consciousness of living to good purpose. And for all this, he was none the less happy—he was far more happy—in his family and in all the relations of private and personal friendship. The way to enjoy home with the highest zest, the way to have the fireside bright with the most quiet heartfelt happiness, is to be active even to weariness, and to come home for refreshment and repose. The way to give new vigor and delight to all the pulses of domestic love and private friendship, is to enlarge the soul and prove it kindred to higher orders of existence, by the culture of large and generous affections.

Do you ask what will make your life happy? Live not for yourself—live for the public good—live for your country—live for the world. Devote yourself to such ends as are worthy of your nature, worthy of a being created in the image of God. And in the pursuit of these ends, do with your might what your hand findeth

to do. Activity for noble ends, is happiness ; nothing else is worthy of the name.

“ An angel’s wing would droop if long at rest,  
And God himself, inactive, were no longer blest.”

3 We see the emptiness of the objects of human ambition. Wealth, honors, the happiness of domestic life—these are the objects in prospect which fill the minds, and call out the utmost efforts of struggling and panting thousands. All these our friend has had—what are they all to him now? To have been rich, to have been surrounded with all that can minister to happiness, to have borne the highest honors of the republic—what is it to the dying man? What is it to the dead? If such things as these are all that you live for, all that you seek or hope for; if such things are the highest good which you have chosen; how empty, how miserable is your inheritance!















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